

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT the life of *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta*'s author comes to us mostly from Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's biography of Lord Caitanya, *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, and from Narahari Cakravartī's account of the lives of Lord Caitanya's followers, *Bhakti-ratnākara*. These two sources inform us that Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī was a chief direct disciple of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the great apostle of love of Kṛṣṇa. Śrī Sanātana (circa 1488–1558) was the seniormost of the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana, an exalted group who helped establish the Gauḍīya *sampradāya*, the school of devotion to Kṛṣṇa that accepts Lord Caitanya to be nondifferent from Kṛṣṇa.

Bhakti-ratnākara traces six generations of Śrī Sanātana's lineage. He was born into a family of respectable Sārasvata *brāhmaṇas* from the southern province of Karṇāṭaka. His great-grandfather Rūpeśvara, after a quarrel with his brother Harihara, migrated to the east, and his grandfather Padmanābha settled on the bank of the Gaṅgā at Naihati, West Bengal. Sanātana's father, Śrī Kumāra, moved further east, into what is now the Jessore district of Bangladesh, and had several sons, the last three of whom he named Amara (later Sanātana), Santoṣa (later Rūpa), and Vallabha (Anupama). These three brothers were from childhood attracted to devotional service. Amara and Santoṣa were especially attracted to Kṛṣṇa, Vallabha to Lord Rāmacandra. Amara had an affinity for the study of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. In his boyhood, we are told, he once dreamed that a *brāhmaṇa* was presenting him a copy of that scripture. The next morning, the same *brāhmaṇa* he had seen actually came to his house and gave him the book. From that time on, Amara was always immersed in *bhāgavatāmṛta*, the nectar of the *Bhāgavatam*.

As adults the brothers proved extremely competent scholars and managers. Impressed by their ability, the Mogul tyrant of Bengal, Nawab Hussain Shah, compelled them into government service. Amara was appointed the Nawab's prime minister, Santoṣa the chief assistant minister, and Vallabha the state treasurer. In this way the Nawab freed himself for military expeditions by turning most of the responsibilities of governing over to the three brothers, who established their residence in the town of Rāmakeli, near the Nawab's capital. By this time Santoṣa was known by his official title Dabira Khāsa, and Amara was called Sākara Mallika. But despite their powerful positions, their only real joy in life lay in serving Kṛṣṇa and His devotees. They made their wealthy estate a suitable place for remembering Kṛṣṇa by planting groves of *kadamba* and other trees that grow in Vṛndāvana, the site of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, and by building replicas of Kṛṣṇa's favorite ponds, the sacred Rādhā-kuṇḍa and Śyāma-kuṇḍa. The brothers also hosted many learned *paṇḍitas*, and discussions of the *Bhāgavatam* and other *śāstras* went on constantly in their assembly.

The three brothers had heard about Lord Caitanya, who was still living as a family man in Navadvīpa, and, despite feeling utterly unqualified, were eager to meet Him. They considered themselves degraded and untouchable, for though their father, Kumāradeva, had been so strict in his brahminical principles that if he even saw the face of a meat-eater he would fast for the day, they were now paid servants of a meat-eater, the *yavana* king. Nonetheless, their enthusiasm impelled them to begin corresponding with Lord Caitanya. And in one letter the Lord encouraged them to be patient:

*para-vyasaninī nārī
vyagrāpi gr̥ha-karmasu
tad evāsvādayaty antar
nava-saṅga-rasāyanam*

“If a woman is attached to a man other than her husband, she will appear very busy in household affairs, though within her heart

always relishing the company of her paramour.” (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya* 1.211)

Soon after Caitanya Mahāprabhu left home to enter the renounced order, He decided to go to Vṛndāvana. Followed by large crowds, He proceeded north and stopped at Rāmakeli. Meanwhile, Hussain Shah received news that this *sannyāsī* was creating a stir in the countryside. But by consulting with Dabira Khāsa and other ministers, the Nawab decided that Caitanya was a worthy saint, or even God Himself, and ordered that no one interfere with His doings. Still, Dabira Khāsa worried that Hussain Shah, capricious as he was, could change his mind and turn against Lord Caitanya. Thus, in the middle of the night, Dabira Khāsa went incognito with Sākara Mallika to warn the Lord of the potential danger.

The two approached Lord Caitanya with straws between their teeth as a sign of humility, bowed prostrate before Him, and with plaintive prayers confessed their unfitness to receive His mercy. In response the Lord showered them with affection:

śuni' mahāprabhu kabe, — śuna, dabira-khāsa
tumi dui bhāi — mora purātana dāsa

“After hearing their prayer, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu said, ‘My dear Dabira Khāsa, you two brothers are My old servants.

āji baite duñbhāra nāma ‘rūpa’ ‘sanātana’
dainya chāḍa, tomāra dainye phāṭe mora mana

“‘My dear Sākara Mallika, from this day your names will be changed to Śrīla Rūpa and Śrīla Sanātana. Now please abandon your humility, for My heart is breaking to see you so humble.’” (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya* 1.207–8)

Sanātana advised that Lord Caitanya not go to Vṛndāvana with so many people, and Lord Caitanya accepted the advice and returned to His base at Purī. The three brothers — Rūpa, Sanātana, and Anupama — then made plans to abandon their material life and join Him, and they engaged *brāhmaṇas*

in performing purificatory rituals to help them quickly realize this hope. Soon Rūpa and Anupama loaded the bulk of their wealth on a large boat and left Rāmakeli for their hometown, leaving their senior brother Sanātana alone to deal with Hussain Shah. In case Sanātana might need emergency funds, Rūpa deposited a large sum with a merchant in Rāmakeli and informed Sanātana about this in a letter. The rest of their wealth he distributed among *brāhmaṇas*, Vaiṣṇavas, and their own family members.

On the plea of illness, Sanātana began to ignore his government duties and stayed home studying *Bhāgavatam* in his assembly of *paṇḍitas*. The Nawab, however, sent his physician to check on Sanātana and received a report that nothing was wrong with Sanātana's health. The Nawab himself then went to Rāmakeli to confront Sanātana, and when Sanātana refused to resume his responsibilities, Hussain Shah put him in prison.

Rūpa and Anupama got news that Lord Caitanya was making a second attempt to visit Vṛndāvana, and they started traveling in that direction. By then Lord Caitanya was already on His way back from Vṛndāvana, and the brothers met Him at Prayāga. There Lord Caitanya instructed Rūpa Gosvāmī for ten days and blessed Him with the power to disseminate pure devotional service. Rūpa wanted to accompany the Lord back to Purī, but the Lord ordered him instead to go to Vṛndāvana and gave him what for him and Sanātana would be their life's mission — to discover the forgotten places of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes and write books to establish the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness for the modern age. Soon, He promised, the brothers could visit Him in Purī.

Rūpa and Anupama went on to Vṛndāvana, which was then a wild jungle. While waiting for Sanātana, they took up a new life of extreme renunciation and intense, blissful meditation on the Supreme Lord's pastimes. As the time approached for Lord Jagannātha's cart festival in Purī, which Lord Caitanya celebrated yearly with His Orissan and Bengali devotees, Rūpa and Anupama started the long walk to Purī. During the journey, on the banks of the Gaṅgā, Anupama passed away. Only after considerable time

would Rūpa and Sanātana be able to reunite, to spend the rest of their lives in Vṇdāvana.

Śrīla Kavi-karṇapūra, an eminent poet among Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu's devotees, has written (in *Caitanya-candrodaya* 9.29, 38):

*yah prāg eva priya-guṇa-gaṇair gāḍha-baddho 'pi mukto
gebādhyāsād rasa iva paro mūrta evāpy amūrtaḥ
premālāpair dṛḍhatara-pariṣvaṅga-raṅgaiḥ prayāge
taṁ śrī-rūpaṁ samam anupamenānujagrāha devaḥ*

“From the very beginning, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī was bound by attraction to the qualities of his beloved Lord yet free from the false identification of family life. Although Śrīla Rūpa had no material body, he was the embodiment of the transcendental tastes of devotional service. At Prayāga the Lord bestowed mercy on Rūpa and his brother Anupama, holding loving conversations with them and embracing them with wholehearted pleasure.”

*kālena vṇdāvana-keli-vārtā
lupteti tām khyāpayitum viśiṣya
kṛpāmṛtenābhīṣeca devas
tatraiva rūpaṁ ca sanātanam ca*

“In the course of time, the transcendental news of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in Vṇdāvana was almost lost. To carry out the work in Vṇdāvana of explicitly enunciating those pastimes, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu empowered Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī and Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī with the nectar of His mercy.”

Using the money left by Rūpa, Sanātana bribed the jail keeper and gained release from prison. He then at once headed north to join Rūpa in Vṇdāvana. Overcoming various difficulties, he arrived disheveled and travel-worn at Benares, where he learned that Lord Caitanya was staying at the house of a devotee named Candraśekhara. Sanātana found his way to Candraśekhara's door and sat down, not daring to ask to be allowed inside. But Lord Caitanya knew without being told that Sanātana

had arrived and requested Candraśekhara to invite into the house the saintly Vaiṣṇava waiting at the door. Candraśekhara looked outside but saw only what he thought was a dirty Muslim beggar. Lord Caitanya sent Candraśekhara back to let the beggar in, and the Lord embraced Sanātana like a lost son.

For two months the Lord kept Sanātana in Benares and instructed him in all the important aspects of pure devotional service to Kṛṣṇa. And the Lord empowered Sanātana, as He had Rūpa, to teach Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the world. As described in the drama *Caitanya-candrodaya* (9.34-35):

*gauḍendrasya sabhā-vibhūṣaṇa-maṇis tyaktvā ya ṛddhāṁ śrīyaṁ
rūpasyāgraja eka eva taruṇīm vairāgya-lakṣmīm dadhe
antar-bhakti-rasena pūrṇa-br̥dayo bāhyāvadbhūtākṛtiḥ
śaivālaiḥ pibitaṁ mahā-sara iva prīti-pradas tad-vidām*

“Śrī Sanātana, Śrī Rūpa’s elder brother, was the prize jewel of the court of the king of Gauḍa. Yet Sanātana gave up his fabulous wealth and power to accept the youthful goddess of renunciation. Although his heart was filled with the ecstatic tastes of devotion, he externally appeared like an outcaste mendicant. Thus he resembled a great lake covered with moss. He was very affectionate to those who knew the tastes of devotion.

*taṁ sanātanam upāgatam akṣṇor
dṛṣṭa-mātram atimātra-dayārdraḥ
ālilinga parighāyata-dorbhyāṁ
sānukampam atba campaka-gaurab*

“As soon as Sanātana arrived and Lord Caitanya saw him, the Lord’s eyes at once overflowed with tears of compassion. And with both arms, broad like war clubs, the *campaka*-golden Lord embraced him with merciful kindness.”

In Vṇḍāvana Rūpa and Sanātana were fully immersed in the mood of separation, remembering Kṛṣṇa and His eternal devotees. The brothers gave up all material indulgences, wandered about the holy land with no fixed residence, and almost com-

pletely forgot to eat and sleep. Sometimes staying together and sometimes moving separately, they constantly searched for the forgotten places of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes and wrote books on advanced topics of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, guided always by *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and other devotional scriptures.

Sanātana was not yet thirty years old when he arrived in Vṛndāvana, and he stayed there for more than forty years, up to the end of his life. He traveled all around the holy district, treating the residents of each village with great affection, because he considered all the Vraja-vāsīs dear to Kṛṣṇa. Though a renunciant normally has no business with material affairs, he would show honest concern for all the villagers, asking them whom their sons and daughters were going to marry, how much milk their cows were giving, and so on. And the Vraja-vāsīs loved him like their own father.

While staying at Mahāvana, where Kṛṣṇa had played as an infant, Sanātana rediscovered one of the three presiding Deities of Vṛndāvana, Śrī Madana-mohana. Observing some boys playing near the bank of the Yamunā at Mahāvana, Sanātana noticed that one of the boys was especially attractive. That night the same boy came to Sanātana in a dream and said he wanted to come live in Sanātana's hut. In the morning Sanātana stepped outside to find the Deity of Madana-mohana standing by the door. He took Madana-mohana to Dvādaśāditya Hill in Vṛndāvana forest, where Śrī Advaita Ācārya Prabhu had earlier worshiped the same Deity, and began to serve Madana-mohana as best he could in his humble circumstances. It pained him, however, to be unable to offer Madana-mohana anything better than dry *capātīs* to eat — without even salt.

To relieve Sanātana Gosvāmī's anxiety, Madana-mohana Himself arranged for His own opulent worship. While bringing a boatload of merchandise to Mathurā, a rich merchant from Multan, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kapūr, ran aground on the shore of the Yamunā at Dvādaśāditya Hill. Kṛṣṇadāsa went to Sanātana to beg his blessings, and Sanātana assured him that Kṛṣṇa would help him get his goods safely to market. That same day, a rainstorm swelled the Yamunā and freed the boat, and Kṛṣṇadāsa, after selling his

goods, offered the proceeds to Sanātana. Śrīla Sanātana asked him to use the money to build a temple and establish proper royal worship for Madana-mohana. The splendid temple of Madana-mohana was a prime attraction of Vṇḍāvana for two centuries and, though desecrated near the end of the seventeenth century by Emperor Aurangzeb, still stands beautifully today.

Sanātana Gosvāmī spent his last years on the side of Govardhana Hill, at Mānasī-gaṅgā lake next to Cakaleśvara, one of four deities of Lord Śiva that protect the four directions of Vṇḍāvana. Every day, Sanātana would walk the longer of the paths around Govardhana, some forty kilometers, although the physical exertion was difficult. Unable to tolerate Sanātana's austerities, Kṛṣṇa appeared to him in person and gave him a large stone from Govardhana, marked with His own footprint. Kṛṣṇa asked Sanātana to simply walk around this *śilā* daily, and that would be equal to circumambulating the whole hill. When Śrīla Sanātana passed away at Mānasī-gaṅgā, men in the villages all over Vraja shaved their heads, as if their own father had died. Sanātana's nephew, Śrī Jīva, brought Sanātana's remains to Vṇḍāvana and installed them in a *samādhi* (sacred tomb) at the Madana-mohana temple. And Sanātana's Govardhana *śilā* he brought for worship in his own temple, that of Rādhā-Dāmodara.

Sanātana Gosvāmī wrote four major books. *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, composed under the direct order of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, is the standard *smṛti*, or handbook of devotional practices, for the followers of Mahāprabhu. *Vaiṣṇava-toṣaṇī* (*Daśama-ṭipannī*) is Śrīla Sanātana's elaborate commentary, full of sublime realizations about Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, on the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. *Kṛṣṇa-līlā-stava*, also known as *Daśama-carita*, is a concise poetic summary of the first half of the Tenth Canto, describing Kṛṣṇa in Vṇḍāvana. And *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* is a set of two stories, presenting in 2,514 verses the essential teachings of the *Bhāgavatam*.

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, in his purport to *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Ādi* 5.203), remarks, "Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī Prabhu, the teacher of the science of devotional service, wrote several books, of which the *Bṛhad-*

bhāgavatāmṛta is very famous; anyone who wants to know about the subject matter of devotees, devotional service, and Kṛṣṇa must read this book. Sanātana Gosvāmī also wrote a special commentary on the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* known as the *Daśama-ṭippaṇī*, which is so excellent that by reading it one can understand very deeply the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa in His exchanges of loving activities.”

In another purport to *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Antya 4.81), Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu wanted to accomplish many purposes through the exegetical endeavors of Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī. First Sanātana Gosvāmī compiled the book called *Brhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* to teach people how to become devotees, execute devotional service and attain love of Kṛṣṇa. Second, he compiled the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, wherein he collected authoritative scriptural injunctions regarding how a Vaiṣṇava should behave. Only by the endeavors of Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī were all the lost places of pilgrimage in the Vṛndāvana area excavated. He established Madana-mohana, the first Deity in the Vṛndāvana area, and by his personal behavior he taught how one should act in the renounced order, completely devoted to the service of the Lord. By his personal example, he taught people how to stay in Vṛndāvana to execute devotional service. The principal mission of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Mathurā and Vṛndāvana are the abodes of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Therefore these two places are very dear to Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and He wanted to develop their glories through Sanātana Gosvāmī.”

Part One

*Śrī-bhagavat-kṛpā-
sāra-nīdhāra*

Finding the Essence of
the Supreme Lord's Mercy